

## Prince Edward Island Acadians in the 1760s and Beyond, and Their Ambivalence in Taking the Oath of Allegiance

OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE DATE BACK TO FEUDAL TIMES in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Oaths, or pledges, were an essential part of the contracts between land-holding nobles and lower class persons benefitting from the use of land. In the 17th century it became common for the monarchs of European countries to require subjects to pledge loyalty through an oath of allegiance in return for certain protections and rights. This was particularly important to monarchs in times of political turmoil, rebellion, and civil war, when royal authority could be challenged and sovereigns overthrown. During the Jacobite uprising of 1745 and 1746, for example, it was very important for the Protestant George II and his government officials to know whom among the populace supported them and who did not. Kings and queens relied on oaths of allegiance as a means of obtaining or demanding loyalty; those who refused could be banished or face other penalties. Concerns relating to loyalty to the British Crown spilled over into the colonies, including Nova Scotia, particularly in the early 1750s, as this was a time when tensions between Great Britain and France were significantly increasing. The Roman Catholic Acadians greatly outnumbered British settlers in Nova Scotia, and they were suspected by colonial officials to be still yearning for a restoration of Acadia to France.<sup>2</sup> The oath of allegiance of the 17th century, both in England and France, was infused with religious overtones, and taking the oath was not something to be done lightly. As pointed out by Yves Durand, a 17th-century French dictionary compiler by the name of Furetière wrote: “The oath is therefore not a simple contract one can easily renounce; it is an engagement before God.”<sup>3</sup> More modern versions of

- 1 The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewers of earlier versions of this research note for their many helpful comments and suggestions.
- 2 In Canada today immigrants who gain Canadian citizenship are required to take an Oath of Citizenship, which includes a declaration of fealty to the Canadian monarch. An oath of allegiance, along with an oath of office, is also required of new occupants of various federal and provincial government positions, Canadian Armed Forces personnel, police forces, justice system positions, etc. The Canadian Oath of Allegiance Act, R.S.C., 1985, O-1, is reproduced at <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/rsc-1985-c-o-1/latest/rsc-1985-c-o-1.html>. For more about oaths of allegiance, including the Acadian context, see Desmond H. Brown, “Foundations of British Policy in the Acadian Expulsion: A Discussion of Land Tenure and the Oath of Allegiance,” *Dalhousie Review* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1977-78): 709-25; N.E.S. Griffiths, “Subjects and Citizens in the Eighteenth Century: The Question of the Acadian Oaths of Allegiance,” in *Les abeilles pillotent: mélanges offerts à René Leblanc*, ed. Glenn Moulaison, Muriel Comeau, and Édouard Langille (Pointe-de-l’Église, NS: Révue de l’Université de Sainte-Anne, 1998), 23-33; and Philippe Doucet, “Politics and the Acadians,” in *Acadia of the Maritimes: Thematic Studies from the Beginning to the Present*, ed. Jean Daigle (Moncton: Chaire d’études acadiennes, 1995), 291.
- 3 Yves Durand, “L’Acadie et les phénomènes de solidarité et de fidélité, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Études canadiennes* 13 (1982): 83, quoted in A.J.B. Johnston, “Borderland Worries: Loyalty Oaths in Acadie/Nova Scotia, 1654-1755,” *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 35.

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oaths of allegiance may have fewer words that speak to a religious element within them, but they have generally retained at least a reference to God. As we shall see, the oath of allegiance was taken more seriously by Acadians at certain times of their history than others.

The oath of allegiance played an important role in the political life of the Acadians of Acadie, or Nova Scotia, from 1670 until 1755, and for some years beyond, but most notably from 1710 until 1755. Indeed, in the latter year it played a pivotal role. Their refusal to take an unqualified oath of allegiance in 1755 was the principal justification cited by Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor Charles Lawrence and his council for their decision to deport all of the Acadians to the American colonies. In the fall of that year Lawrence succeeded in deporting about 7,000 of an estimated population of 10,000.<sup>4</sup> During the seven years that followed, there would be additional waves of Acadian deportations from Nova Scotia, Île Saint-Jean, and Île Royale. In 1758 roughly 3,000 Acadians from Île Saint-Jean (about two-thirds of the population) were deported to France while the remainder escaped to Miramichi or Bay of Chaleur. Of those deported from Île Saint-Jean, one-half died from drowning and shipborne disease during the passage to France and still more died of disease soon after arriving.<sup>5</sup> Some of those who had escaped to the mainland began to filter back to the renamed Saint John's Island in the early 1760s.<sup>6</sup> It has been estimated that by the time that the Seven Years War officially ended in 1763, some 10,000 Acadians had died of disease, drowning, and/or malnutrition as a direct result of the Grand Dérangement – a term that refers to the colossal upheaval in the lives of Acadians as a result of the British campaign to remove them from the Maritime region between 1755 and 1763.<sup>7</sup>

The Acadian attitude about taking an oath of allegiance during the one or two decades immediately after the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, is a subject that has been seldom explored by historians. This research note examines the attitude of Acadians who returned to Saint John's Island during the 1760s towards the oath of allegiance and fidelity to the sovereign. It will draw on four newly discovered documents, three of which relate to loyalty to the French king, in conjunction with previously known documents.<sup>8</sup> It will also

4 Some historians have stated that the number deported was 6,000, or 6,000 to 7,000. For discussion of the number of Acadians deported, see A.J.B. (John) Johnston, "The Acadian Deportation in a Comparative Context: An Introduction," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 10 (2007): 128n5. See also John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 424, and N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Acadian Deportation: Deliberate Perfidy or Cruel Necessity* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1969), 1, 4. Faragher and Griffiths state "approximately 7,000" and "some seven thousand," respectively, as an estimate of the number deported in 1755. The estimate of 10,000 for Acadians residing in Nova Scotia in September 1755 is derived from the analysis of Stephen A. White, "The True Number of the Acadians," in *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation: nouvelles perspectives historiques*, dir. Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc (Moncton: Chaire d'études acadiennes, 2005), 55-6. Excluded from the estimate of 10,000 are the Acadians then living on Île Saint-Jean and Île Royale – both were French territory at the time.

5 Earle Lockerby, *La deportation des Acadiens de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard* (Montréal: Les Éditions au Carré, 2010), 112-5.

6 Georges Arsenault, *The Island Acadians 1720-1980* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1987), 51-4.

7 Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*, 424.

8 One of the new discoveries involves three documents from 1763 that are in the papers of Jean Baptiste Charles Henri Hector, comte d'Estaing, at the Archives nationales in France. This

compare the attitude of these returnees with that of Acadians residing in mainland Nova Scotia.<sup>9</sup>

Several of these newly discovered documents, all of which relate to Acadians on Saint John's Island during the first half of the 1760s, have been presented in transcribed form in an earlier paper that focuses on the genealogical information that can be derived from two of them.<sup>10</sup> The present research note makes use of these documents in a new way – namely, to shed light on the matter of the oath of allegiance.

The concept of Acadian neutrality, in the context of their taking a qualified oath, emerged in 1717 when the Acadians informed colonial officials that they were prepared to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarch only if it were understood and accepted that they would not be required to take up arms against the French and Mi'kmaq in future conflicts.<sup>11</sup> Acadian intransigence regarding the oath of allegiance would be a thorn in the side of colonial officials for much of the next four decades. The manner in which these officials decided in 1755 to resolve the matter once and for all – by deporting the Acadians – resulted in two or three decades of immense hardship and disruption in the lives of not only the deported Acadians, but also those Acadians who managed to flee. Over the following century, the collective memory of the event was instrumental in helping Acadians to overcome adversity, to rebuild, and to re-establish a cohesive ethnic identity. For more than two-and-one-half centuries, the oath of allegiance has been a central and controversial theme of Acadian historiography. During the last two decades of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th, it elicited fierce debates between anglophone and francophone historians.<sup>12</sup>

discovery was made by Régis Brun, a researcher at the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme-Chiasson at the Université de Moncton, while he was examining digitized copies of documents from the d'Estaing papers provided to him by Dr. Christopher Hodson of Brigham Young University. In early 1764 the comte d'Estaing was appointed governor-general of the French Leeward Islands and was based principally in Saint-Domingue. From the beginning of his tenure, he sought to attract Acadians to settle in that colony. Another document, dating from 1765, was discovered by the author in the Thomas Gage Papers, American Series (Gage Papers) at the William L. Clements Library (WCL) at the University of Michigan.

- 9 From 1763 until 1784, mainland Nova Scotia included present-day New Brunswick. From 1763 until 1769, Saint John's Island was administratively a part of Nova Scotia.
- 10 Georges Arsenault and Earle Lockerby, "Les Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine dans les années 1760," *La Société historique acadienne, les Cahiers* 47, no. 3 (septembre 2016): 93-158. A much-condensed English/French version of this paper is Georges Arsenault and Earle Lockerby, "The Acadians on Saint John's Island in the 1760s/Les Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean dans les années 1760," *Island Magazine* 79 (Spring/Summer 2016): 12-25.
- 11 N.E.S. Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 270-2; Charles D. Mahaffie Jr., *A Land of Discord Always: Acadia from Its Beginnings to the Expulsion of Its People, 1604-1755* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2008), 154-5.
- 12 The best-known protagonists were the eminent American historian Francis Parkman and the Québécois priest Henri-Raymont Casgrain. See Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, vol. 1 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1897), chap. IV, VIII. A small monograph that relies heavily on Parkman's latter chapter is W.J. Noxon, ed., *The Acadian Tragedy* (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1968). For Casgrain, see H.R. Casgrain, "Coup d'oeil sur l'Acadie: Avant la dispersion de la colonie française," in *Le Canada-Français*, vol. premier (Québec: Imprimerie de L.-J. Demers & Frère, 1888), 114-34, and H.-R. Casgrain, *La Question acadienne et le Rapport sur Les Archives du Canada pour 1894* (Québec: n.p., 1895). For commentary on the intellectual duelling between Parkman and Casgrain, see Edward P. Hamilton, "Parkman, Abbé Casgrain and Bougainville's

It was more than a century after the Acadian deportation took place before a significant Acadian historiography emerged. The main contributors initially were historians in France and Acadia or Québécois historians in Canada.<sup>13</sup> In recent decades a number of English-language monographs that deal comprehensively with Acadian history have appeared. They deal with the oath of allegiance up until the deportation of 1755 to varying extents as part of the broader narrative.<sup>14</sup> And during the last decade or two, anglophone authors have published in academic journals several papers that are devoted largely to the oath of allegiance and the role it played in the Acadian experience.<sup>15</sup> During the same time period, contributions to the French-language historiography, as regards 17th- and 18th-century Acadian history, have been fewer. Several deal with the history of Acadians in more restricted geographical areas, such as Prince Edward Island (Saint John's Island officially became Prince Edward Island in 1799) and what is today peninsular Nova Scotia. The oath of allegiance is a subject that has been addressed in depth by almost no francophone historians in recent decades.<sup>16</sup>

Journal," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* LXXI (October 1961): 261-70. For a defense of Nova Scotia provincial archivist Thomas Beamish Akins concerning Casgrain's attacks against Akins, see B.C. Cuthbertson, "Thomas Beamish Akins: British North America's Pioneer Archivist," *Acadiensis* VII, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 86-102. Other partisans in the debates were – for the "British view" – Adams G. Archibald, "The Expulsion of the Acadians," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society For the Year 1886-87*, vol. V (Halifax: Wm. MacNab, 1887), 11-95, and – for the "French view" (although written in English) – Édouard Richard, *Acadia: Missing Links of a Lost Chapter*, vol. 2 (New York: Home Book Company, 1895), esp. chap. XXXII to XXXIV in which Parkman is castigated; see also Henri d'Arles, *La déportation des Acadiens* (Québec: Imprimerie de l'Action Sociale, 1918).

- 13 See, for example, [Edme] Rameau Saint-Père, *Une Colonie Féodale en Amérique: L'Acadie (1604-1881)* (Montréal: Granger Frères, 1889), 2 vol.; L'Abbé H.-R. Casgrain, *Une Seconde Acadie* (Québec: Imprimerie de L.-J. Demers & Frère, 1894); Richard, *Acadia: Missing Links of a Lost Chapter*; Émile Lauvrière, *La Tragédie d'un Peuple: Histoire du Peuple Acadien de Ses Origines à Nos Jours* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1922), 2 vol.; Placide Gaudet, *Le Grand Déplacement: Sur qui retomber la responsabilité de l'Expulsion des Acadiens* (Ottawa: Imprimerie de l'Ottawa Printing Co, 1922).

- 14 Seminal and comprehensive works relating to general, colonial-period Acadian history are Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian* (which ends at 1755) and Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*. Other works include Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Mahaffie Jr., *Land of Discord Always*; and Dean Jobb, *The Acadians: A People's Story of Exile and Triumph* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons, 2005). For the Acadian diaspora following the expulsion, see Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gregory M.W. Kennedy, in *Something of a Peasant Paradise? Comparing Rural Societies in Acadie and the Loudunais, 1604-1755* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), compares rural societies in Acadia to those of the Loudunais, France during the 1604 to 1755 period, and repeatedly makes references to the oath of allegiance.

- 15 Griffiths, "Subjects and Citizens," in Moulaison et al., *Les Abeilles pillotent*; A.J.B. Johnston, "D'autres serments de loyauté," tran. Sylvain Filion, *La Société historique acadienne, les Cahiers* 33, no. 3 (septembre 2002): 142-53; Johnston, "Borderland Worries," 31-48.

- 16 A francophone author who has dealt in depth with the oath of allegiance is Yves Durand, "L'Acadie et les phénomènes de solidarité et fidélité au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 13 (décembre 1982): 81-4. A number of fairly recent, French-language monographs deal with broad aspects of Acadian history and some of these do cursorily discuss the oath of allegiance. French-language monographs of recent decades dealing with Acadian history more generally include Nicolas Landry et Nicole Landry, *L'Histoire de l'Acadie*,

Although, as mentioned earlier, there has been little work regarding Acadians and the oath of allegiance after 1760, particularly after the Treaty of Paris of 1763, various well-known archival fonds may contain historical documents that can shed light on this subject.<sup>17</sup> These would facilitate a yet-to-be-undertaken comprehensive and thorough regional study. Such investigation would help to establish whether or not there were significant regional variations in the attitude of Acadians toward the oath of allegiance in the post-1763 period.

Given the substantial degree of communication that existed between Acadians living throughout what are now the Maritime Provinces, as well as the Magdalen Islands and the islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, there is reason to believe that the attitudes prevalent in Saint John's Island were typical of those elsewhere in the region.<sup>18</sup> The recently discovered documents and others utilized or cited in this research note support this thesis. A common thread running through a number of these documents is the attitude of Acadians, particularly those on Saint John's Island, toward loyalty to the king of England or the king of France at the end of the Seven Years War and beyond.

### French documents from 1763

The Seven Years War resulted in all of the eastern part of North America, except for the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, becoming, or remaining, British colonial territory. That meant that practically all Acadians in this vast area, many of whom had been deported to the American colonies in 1755, were now living under British rule. Many who had escaped deportation were scattered across Nova Scotia, the Gaspé, the

2nd ed. (Québec: Septentrion, 2014); Régis Brun, *Les acadiens avant 1755: essai* (Moncton: Régis Brun, 2003); Georges Arsenault, *Les Acadiens de l'Île, 1720-1980* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1987); Jean-François Mouhot, *Les Réfugiés acadiens en France: 1758-1785, L'impossible réintégration?* (Québec: Septentrion, 2009); Sally Ross and J. Alphonse Deveau, *Les Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Ecosse: hier et aujourd'hui* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1995) (a translation of a work that first appeared in English). There are also 20 collected papers by francophone authors that appear in Jean Daigle, dir., *Les Acadiens des Maritimes: Études Thematiques* (Moncton: Chaire d'études acadiennes, 1994), but only two or three deal broadly with Acadian history. Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc's edited collection *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation* presents ten papers of which half are in French.

17 The fonds likely to be of most interest would be the correspondence between colonial officials at Halifax and the Board of Trade and Plantations in London during the 1760s and 1770s and the minutes of council meetings in Halifax for the same period. The former are found in CO 217 at Nova Scotia Archives, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), and the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), London. The latter are at the Nova Scotia Archives RG 3 fonds. For Saint John's Island there are occasional references to Acadians taking, or not taking, the oath of allegiance in dispatches from the commanders at Fort Amherst and Louisbourg to General Thomas Gage, commander-in-chief for North America; see Gage Papers at WCL at the University of Michigan.

18 It is well known that forced or encouraged relocation and repeated, voluntary migration characterized the Acadian experience from 1755 until almost the close of the 18th century. Often these peregrinations involved movement to or from places outside the Maritime region, as discussed by Robert A. LeBlanc, "The Acadian Migrations," *Cahiers de géographie de Québec* 11, no. 24 (1967): 523-41. Perhaps the best evidence of a good deal of migration within the region, including the Magdalene Islands and Miquelon, comes from genealogical studies of Acadian families on Saint John's Island. For example, see Arsenault and Lockerby, "Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine," 93-158.



Magdalen Islands, other parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and in parts of the St. Lawrence Valley in Canada. In early 1763 an officer in the French embassy in London issued an invitation to Acadians in North America to remove themselves to French soil – in other words, to France itself, to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and to colonies still held by France in the Caribbean and the northeast coast of South America.<sup>19</sup> Acadians wishing to remove to French territory were requested to draw up lists containing the names of the men, women and children who sought to be transported.

Such a list (for a transcription, see appendix) was prepared by, or on behalf of, the Acadians then residing on Saint John's Island and the Magdalen Islands, together with two covering letters or memorials: one to the king of France and one to the Duc de Nivernais, who was the French ambassador in London.<sup>20</sup> These are three of the four newly discovered documents referred to earlier. In the two letters, which are similar to each other, the Acadians declared their loyalty to France. In the letter to the Duc de Nivernais, they referred to the French king as their “father” and to themselves as his “children.”<sup>21</sup> Further, they “will always be ready to shed their last drop of blood in the service of the king and for the royal family.”<sup>22</sup> In the letter to the king, the Acadians declared that they had never wavered in their obedience to him and that, as his faithful servants, they humbly “prostrate themselves at the foot of his throne.” There is no evidence that French officials ever provided assistance to these Acadians, or other Acadians, to relocate in the 1760s from British territory to French territory, and it has been suggested that their removal may have been discouraged or blocked by the British government.<sup>23</sup>

19 Hodson, *Acadian Diaspora*, 96, 154; Mouhot, *Réfugiés acadiens en France*, 50; Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*, 422-6; Placide Gaudet, “Acadian Genealogy and Notes,” *Report Concerning Canadian Archives for the Year 1905*, Vol. II, Appendix A, Part III (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1906), xvi-xvii, 137-9; Arsenault and Lockerby, “Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine,” 93-158.

20 “De Lisle De St. Jean Dit Port La joye, Liste Des habitants acadiens Demeurants sur Lisle De St. Jean et autres places” [undated, but 1763], Fonds amiral d'Estaing (XVIIIe siècle), 562 AP/16, p. 118, Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France; Habitants au roi, 17 septembre 1763, Fonds amiral d'Estaing, 562 AP/16, p. 117; Habitants au duc de Nivernais, 17 septembre 1763, Fonds amiral d'Estaing, 562 AP/16, p. 120; for a transcription of the list, see the appendix of this research note. For a facsimile of the original, handwritten list, see Arsenault and Lockerby, “Acadians on Saint John's Island in the 1760s,” 17. For a transcription of each of the latter two documents (letters), see Arsenault and Lockerby, “Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine,” 154-6.

21 In the 17th and 18th centuries, the terms “father” (for the French king) and “children” (for his subjects) were commonly used to characterize a certain figurative relationship. In France, this construct evolved centuries earlier. See Daisy Delongu, *Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign: The Rise of the French Vernacular Royal Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 74. In North America, French colonial officials introduced and employed this concept in their dealings with Indigenous peoples with whom they formed military alliances; these peoples were portrayed as children of the French king. In the Acadian context dealt with here, the terminology may not imply subservience as much as being simply the commonly used language for making a request to His Most Christian Majesty.

22 This language is reminiscent of words used by Acadians at Port Royal in 1790 who “were ready to die for their country [France] . . .”; see Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 156.

23 Gaudet, “Acadian Genealogy and Notes,” xvii; Mouhot, *Réfugiés acadiens en France*, 48-9.

### Later documents

Samuel Holland, a surveyor and cartographer appointed by the British government, arrived on Saint John's Island in the fall of 1764 to begin his survey of the coast of northeastern North America. In letters to Lord Hillsborough, president of the British Board of Trade and Plantations, and Nova Scotia Governor Wilmot, Holland briefed them on the Island Acadians, whom he described as "Prisoners [who] are kept on the same footing as those at Halifax."<sup>24</sup> According to Holland, the Acadians had approached him "to beg protection, as the present Commanding officer lays claim to everything they have; the Captain [Ralph Hill, the commanding officer at Fort Amherst] says that they refused the oath of allegiance, but they told me they would do anything required and become good subjects here, or they would be glad to be transported to Canada."<sup>25</sup> Since the Canada they had in mind (what is now the province of Quebec) was by 1764 a British colony, these Acadians seemingly were now much less inclined to shed their last drop of blood for the king of France than they had professed to be one year earlier.<sup>26</sup>

A list, dated 31 August 1765 at Amherst Harbour (now Havre-Aubert) in the Magdalen Islands, contains the names of 22 Acadian men, most of whom had been living on Saint John's Island until they fled in 1758 to escape deportation. In 1765 they were in the employ of Richard Gridley, a New England entrepreneur engaged in walrus hunting in the Magdalen Islands. The list is prefaced by the statement that these Acadians "do sincerely and severally promise and swear, that we will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George."<sup>27</sup> Being illiterate, each had applied his mark in the form of a cross or "X" in lieu of a signature on the document that had been drawn up by a Royal Navy captain named Thomas Allwright.

Such a declaration would have been a requirement for employment. It was common practice during the 17th and 18th centuries for British governments to require subjects to take or retake an oath of allegiance when a new monarch ascended the throne and when, as a result of armed conflict leading to a regime change, the subjects found themselves residing in territory ruled by a different kingdom.<sup>28</sup> In 1765 Captain Hill was replaced by Captain Joseph Williams, and several documents prepared by him are revealing of his views although perhaps also coloured by those of his predecessor. In the summer of 1765, Williams wrote to General Thomas Gage, based in New York: "The French Inhabitants or rather

24 Samuel Holland to Lord Hillsborough, n.d. (but from context, October 1764), Coventry Papers, MG24 K2, vol. 6, p. 41, LAC.

25 Holland to Montagu Wilmot, October 1764, Coventry Papers, MG24 K2, vol. 6, p. 43, LAC; Holland to Hillsborough, 28 November 1764, Coventry Papers, MG24 K2, vol. 6, p. 46, LAC.

26 Such flexibility is consistent with the behaviour of Acadians during the period from 1670 until 1710. See Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 400, and Mahaffie Jr., *Land of Discord Always*, 113, 152.

27 List of Acadians, 31 August 1765, CO 194/16, p. 252, TNA. For a published version of the list, see "Îles de la Madeleine en 1765," *La Société historique acadienne, les Cahiers* III, no. 9 (1970): 370-2. In the published version the date is erroneously given as 3 August 1765.

28 Johnston, "Borderland Worries," 33-5, and Griffiths, "Subjects and Citizens," in Moulaison et al., *Abeilles pillotent*, 26-8. The Acadians on the Magdalen Islands in 1765 had probably not taken an oath following the regime change brought about by the Seven Years War, until doing so in August of that year. For an earlier example of Acadians taking an oath of allegiance (to King George I) in order to have employment, see Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 64, 90.

vagrants settled without authority on this Island have refus'd to take the oath of allegiance tender'd to them.”<sup>29</sup> In December of that year, he again wrote to Gage that upon arriving on the Island he had corresponded with Governor Wilmot to apprise him of the situation on the Island and to specifically inform the governor that he “required some directions concerning the French.” According to Williams, Governor Wilmot had responded that “respecting the French whom he is pleased to stile [call] Acadians tho’ they do not come under that denomination . . . the Government had not yet resolved what to do with them.” Williams further pointed out that the Acadians who had not been “sent off this Island” in 1758 had “infested these seas as Pirates” and had “thrown themselves . . . on the clemency” of his predecessor, Captain Ralph Hill. The Acadians had “no other licence but [Hill’s] liberty to settle here, & His Indulgence was only meant ’till He knew the Government’s pleasure concerning them.”<sup>30</sup> Williams concluded his letter to Gage by enclosing a list of the Acadians then residing on the Island, prefacing the list by the words “These have & do all refuse to take the oath of allegiance to His Brittanick Majesty.”<sup>31</sup> This is the fourth of the newly discovered documents relating to the position of Acadians on Saint John’s Island regarding the oath of allegiance.<sup>32</sup>

However, employment opportunities can change minds. An affidavit from the fall of 1768 relates to the illegal cutting of large white pine trees at Three Rivers by a British entrepreneur who employed Island Acadians.<sup>33</sup> Nine Acadians were involved, including Jean LeBlanc who had been deported in 1755 from Grand-Pré to Massachusetts where he apparently learned some English. This enabled him to act as a spokesman for his workmates and accounts for his being the person who made an affidavit in English. According to the affidavit, LeBlanc had “taken the oaths of allegiance and fidelity to his majesty King George the third.” Acadians who took an oath of allegiance to George III did so orally. In at least some instances a written certificate was produced at the time the oath was taken, to provide proof. Such documents were printed forms in which pertinent information was entered by hand – the name of the person taking the oath, place, date, and name and signature of the administering officer.<sup>34</sup>

29 Joseph Williams to Thomas Gage, 12 August 1765, Gage Papers, vol. 41, WCL.

30 Williams to Gage, 10 December 1765, Gage Papers, vol. 46, WCL. A few of the Acadians who had been living on the Island until 1758, and who evaded deportation that year, may have engaged in the harassment of British shipping. It is certainly known that some Acadians in the region did so (see footnote no. 46). It is also known that in 1762 some 16 Acadian families on Saint John’s Island were being saved from starvation by the largesse of the commander at Fort Amherst; see Earle Lockerby, “The Deportation of the Acadians from Ile St.-Jean, 1758,” *Acadiensis* XXVII, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 90.

31 “List of French Inhabitants on St Johns Island,” 10 Dec. 1765, enclosed with Williams to Gage, 10 December 1765, Gage Papers, vol. 46, WCL.

32 A transcription of this document may be found in Arsenault and Lockerby, “Acadiens à l’île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine,” 157-8.

33 Gamaliel Smethurst, *A Narrative of an Extraordinary Escape* (London: J. Bew and A. Grant, [1774]), 41-2. Three Rivers got its name from what are now the Montague River, Brudenell River, and Cardigan River. The chief towns in this area today are Georgetown and Montague.

34 A certificate bearing the name of Solomon Maillet, signed on 21 May 1768 in Kings County, NS, was offered at auction in Halifax in 2017 and was acquired by the Municipality of the District of



### Uncertainty, ambivalence, and flexibility

Two of the foregoing documents clearly state that these Acadians' loyalty was to the King of France, at least at the time of their writing. In subsequent, English-language documents, many of the very same Acadians are reported to have taken an oath of allegiance to the British monarch, coincident with their taking employment with British entrepreneurs. In still later instances, the very same Acadians are said to have not yet taken the oath of allegiance or to have refused to take it.<sup>35</sup>

The evidence suggests a considerable degree of flexibility concerning the oath of allegiance on the part of these Acadians that was not characteristic of the majority of Acadians living in Nova Scotia from about 1717, when the idea of their neutrality emerged, until the deportation of 1755. During this period they were inflexible, being prepared to take the oath only on condition that they not be required to bear arms. However, the attitude of Acadians in Saint John's Island in the 1760s had similarities with that of Acadians in peninsular Nova Scotia prior to the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht. When the New Englander Sir William Phips captured Port Royal in 1690 he administered an oath of allegiance to adult male Acadians. Whether the oath was taken willingly (as stated by Phips) or under extreme duress (according to a French account) there was, as stated by Gregory M.W. Kennedy, "little expectation that this meant very much."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, as A.J.B. Johnston noted in reference to the 1690 event, "allegiance was something that could flow one way or the other, depending on the context," and "oaths of loyalty were variously seen as something sworn when forced to, something reinforced on a regular basis, and something akin to a protective talisman."<sup>37</sup> In the words of yet another historian, the Acadians "swore as Phips asked because it seemed a way to be rid of him and his men, and it worked."<sup>38</sup>

By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Acadia, or Nova Scotia, officially became a British colony. However, the unwillingness of the inhabitants to swear an unconditional oath of allegiance to their new sovereign soon emerged as a sticking point and became a recurring issue over the subsequent decades. The several decades prior to 1750 were ones of relative stability for the Acadians.<sup>39</sup> By 1720 many, if not most, had taken a conditional oath of allegiance, seeking to be militarily neutral. Later, a few may have taken the unconditional oath required by Governor

Clare, NS. A certificate in the name of Pierre Beliveau, signed on 31 May 1768 in Kings County, NS, is held by the Centre d'études acadiennes Anselme-Chiasson and is catalogued under CN-1-166.

35 That the same individual Acadians swung from one position to another concerning the oath of allegiance over the period from 1763 to 1765 is shown in Arsenault and Lockerby, "Les Acadiens à l'île Saint-Jean et aux îles de la Madeleine," 122-51.

36 Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?* 86; Faragher, *Great and Noble Scheme*, 89-90.

37 Johnston, "Borderland Worries," 37.

38 Mahaffie Jr., *Land of Discord Always*, 113.

39 During the first half of the 1720s hostilities frequently flared between the Mi'kmaq and the British in Nova Scotia, but these troubles did not significantly affect most Acadians. For a couple of months during the summer of 1744, when the French military leader François Du Pont Duvivier travelled through Acadie on his way to retake Annapolis Royal, there was some short-term disruption to the lives of many Acadians. Duvivier demanded their cooperation in supplying his troops with food, tools, and equipment; see Bernard Potier, *Course à l'Acadie: Journal de campagne de François Du Pont Duvivier en 1744* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1982).

Edward Cornwallis in 1749 while a few others may have taken no oath at all.<sup>40</sup> From 1750 to 1755 Acadians in Nova Scotia were under increased pressure from British colonial officials to take an unconditional oath but they steadfastly refused to alter their position, just as they had done repeatedly since 1717. During the same period, many Acadians were encouraged by some of their priests – notably Abbé Jean-Louis Le Loutre – to be loyal to France. Indeed, in 1750 Le Loutre played a key role in torching the homes in Beaubassin of close to a thousand Acadians in order to force them to relocate to “Acadie française” (i.e., lands to the west of the Missaguash River, which is today the dividing line between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick).<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, they were subjected to pressure by local French military officials to take an oath of allegiance to the king of France.<sup>42</sup> Recalcitrants who were reluctant to swear allegiance to the French king and to serve in the militia under Chevalier Pierre la Corne were threatened with swift deportation and forfeiture of their lands.<sup>43</sup> In addition, many Acadians became worried by the growing militarization of Nova Scotia – the establishment of Halifax as a naval base and the construction of forts Beauséjour, Gaspereaux, and Lawrence. Some Acadians responded by relocating to French territory, principally Île Saint-Jean, a move that was promoted and supported by the French government as a matter of policy. By far the largest block, however, was comprised of those who remained in what was called “Acadie anglaise,” the lands of present-day Nova Scotia, excluding the island of Cape Breton.<sup>44</sup> Those who did so generally did not revert from one position concerning the oath to a less, or more, onerous one, let alone back again, at any time during the 1713 to 1755 period.<sup>45</sup>

However, the circumstances of the 1760s, particularly the early 1760s, were quite different. After the fall of Quebec in 1759, many Acadians were not yet ready to accept British rule. Indeed, any who may have been aware of how British officials handled the oath of allegiance in relation to thousands of Canadiens after the Battle of the Plains of

40 Six Acadian families who had moved from Acadia to Île Royale in 1749 attempted to return in 1754. They succeeded only after agreeing to take an unconditional oath of allegiance. See Geoffrey Plank, “King George II and the Acadian Removal,” in LeBlanc, *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation*, 85-6.

41 Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 392. The French claimed this river to be the boundary between Nova Scotia and New France, and in 1751 governor of Canada, La Galissonière, ambitiously launched a program of fort building in the area, including Beauséjour.

42 W. Earle Lockerby, “Le serment d’allégeance, le service militaire, les déportations et les Acadiens : opinions de France et de Québec aux 17<sup>e</sup> et 18<sup>e</sup> siècles,” *Acadiensis* XXXVII, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2008): 149-71.

43 Plank, “King George II and the Acadian Removal,” in LeBlanc, *Grand Dérangement à la Déportation*, 88; Johnston, “Borderland Worries,” 41; Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 131.

44 For the distribution of Acadians in various parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence Region in 1754 and 1755, see White, “True Number of the Acadians,” in LeBlanc, *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation*, 55-6.

45 Two exceptions come to mind. Acadians who in the early 1750s were enticed or forced to relocate from Beaubassin in “Acadie anglaise” to what the French held to be “Acadie française” – i.e., to the area immediately west of the Missaguash River – constitute a special case. Upon relocating to territory that they were given to believe was French, they were required to take an oath of allegiance to the French king; many, or most, did. See Lockerby, “Serment d’allégeance,” 163-7. Also, during François Du Pont Duvivier’s military campaign in 1744 to retake Annapolis Royal, he required Acadians in the Les Mines area to take an oath of allegiance to the French king; see Potier, *Course à l’Acadie*, 76, 161-2.

Abraham perhaps had good reason to equivocate or hold back. The Canadiens cooperated with the British to a degree “by surrendering their arms, taking a nominal oath of allegiance, and obeying British ordinances while reserving their ultimate allegiance to France and assisting the French armed forces wherever possible.”<sup>46</sup> Some Acadians engaged in attacking and harassing British civilian ships.<sup>47</sup> In 1759, Father Pierre Maillard, a missionary to the Acadians and Mi’kmaq, tried to dissuade the perpetrators of such actions and encouraged them to submit to British authorities peaceably.<sup>48</sup> The threat to British shipping continued for at least two more years. In late 1761 a Boston newspaper reported that the Acadians of the Bay of Chaleur had “done much Mischief these two or three Years past in intercepting our Vessels bound to Halifax, Louisbourg and the River St. Lawrence . . . .”<sup>49</sup> During the summer of 1761, three armed Royal Navy vessels patrolled the Gulf of St. Lawrence in case “any of the discontented Inhabitants should attempt to fit out chaloupes against our Trade.”<sup>50</sup>

Several hundred Acadians served in the militia of New France, along with Canadiens and Indigenous warriors, under Chevalier François-Gaston de Lévis at the Battle of Sainte-Foye in the spring of 1760.<sup>51</sup> Two months later, an estimated 700 Acadians took part in the Battle of the Restigouche at the head of the Bay of Chaleur, serving both on land and on the water.<sup>52</sup>

Leading up to the Treaty of Paris in 1763, some Acadians no doubt hoped that Nova Scotia would be handed back to the French, as was Île Royale in 1748 by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle and as was Acadia itself on four occasions by treaty during the 17th century. For the Acadians, the post-1763 political landscape in their region was a shifting and uncertain one from every point of view. Acadians in Nova Scotia, Saint John’s Island, and the Gulf of St. Lawrence region were likely aware that in 1762 French forces had captured St. John’s, Newfoundland.<sup>53</sup> Although the British regained the port about three months later, and France and Great Britain signed a peace treaty early the following year, Acadians could not help but know that

46 Peter MacLeod, “Treason at Quebec: British Espionage in Canada during the Winter of 1759,” *Canadian Military History* II, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 57.

47 For attacks on shipping in the Strait of Canso and the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1759 and 1760, see Charles Lawrence to Board of Trade, 20 September 1759, CO 217/16, p. 322v-323v, TNA; Edward Whitmore to Jeffery Amherst, 22 January 1760, WO 34/17, p. 105-8, TNA; John Adlam to Whitmore, 6 May 1760, ADM 1/1835, TNA; Whitmore to Lawrence, 16 May 1760, ADM 1/1835, TNA.

48 Maillard to Alexandre LeBlanc, 27 November 1759 and 31 December 1759, in Gaudet, “Acadian Genealogy and Notes,” 187-9.

49 *Boston Newsletter*, 10 December 1761.

50 “An Account of the Disposition of his Majesty’s Squadron in North America, under the command of the Right Honble the Lord Colvill, August 8th 1761,” ADM 1/482, p. 309, TNA.

51 John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America*, vol. II, ed. Arthur G. Doughty (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1914), 396, 445.

52 John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America*, vol. III, ed. Arthur G. Doughty (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), 402; Judith Beattie and Bernard Pothier, *The Battle of the Restigouche* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1996), 17-25.

53 André de Visme, *Terre-Neuve 1762: dernière combat aux portes de la Nouvelle France* (Montréal: Éditions André de Visme, 2005); Evan W.H. Fyers, “The Loss and Recapture of St. John’s, Newfoundland, in 1762,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* XI (1932): 179-215.

Acadie had shifted back and forth between the French and the British seven times.<sup>54</sup> In far-off France, government policies were also shifting and evolving, one manifestation of this being the circulation of rumours of a French military expedition that would retake Acadia.<sup>55</sup>

In the early 1760s it was still illegal for Acadians to reside in peninsular Nova Scotia. General Jeffery Amherst had ordered that the Acadians residing in the Bay of Chaleur area should be dispersed among the Canadiens in Quebec. To this end, Governor of Canada James Murray wrote to Nova Scotia Lieutenant Governor Jonathan Belcher in the fall of 1761 and proposed that these Acadians be brought “to the upper parts of Canada.” In his response the following March, Belcher fully endorsed this plan, noting “that it will by no means be safe to suffer the Acadians to remain in this Province as Settlers . . . and that the placing of them some where in the distant Precincts of Canada will be most advantageous in every respect . . . if they should be permitted at all to remain in America.”<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, however, a raid led by Captain Roderick MacKenzie on Acadian settlements on the shores of the Bay of Chaleur had resulted in some of the Acadians being taken into custody and brought to Fort Cumberland.<sup>57</sup> Raids and roundups continued. From June 1763 to March 1764 British authorities apprehended and detained 343 Acadian men, women, and children at Les Mines alone.<sup>58</sup>

For their part, British colonial authorities showed indecisiveness and a degree of unease regarding the Acadians during the 1760s. Depending on the year and the men in power, the local British authorities did not know whether they should mistrust the Acadians or court them. These officials were well aware that the Acadians were useful for building forts and roads, building and repairing dykes, clearing land, supplying fuelwood, acting as pilots, helping to deal with the Mi’kmaq, and providing translation services. Very probably the Acadians’ ambivalent loyalties exacerbated the mistrust and fears of colonial officials, sentiments reflected in the decision to ensure that the Acadians be settled in small, scattered groups.<sup>59</sup> Acadian

54 Doucet, “Politics and the Acadians,” in Daigle, *Acadia of the Maritimes*, 289.

55 Such rumours were stoked in 1763 by an Acadian patriot identified only as “Beau Soleil,” who had just returned from France with the assurances of the Duc d’Auvergne that the Acadians would soon be regaining their former lands; see *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 13 October 1763. “Beau Soleil” was very likely Joseph Brossard dit Beausoleil, or his brother, Alexandre.

56 James Murray to Jonathan Belcher, 20 September 1761, MG8-E1, vol. 1, pp. 184-5, LAC; Jonathan Belcher to James Murray, 25 March 1762, MG8-E1, vol. 1, p. 188, LAC.

57 MacKenzie to Forster, 3 November 1761, transcribed in Régis Sygfroy Brun, dir., “Papiers Amherst (1760-1763) concernant les Acadiens,” *Société historique acadienne, Les Cahiers* III, no. 7 (avril, mai, juin 1970): 305-7; Ronnie-Gilles LeBlanc, “Les Acadiens à Halifax et dans l’île Georges, 1755-1764,” *Port Acadie: revue interdisciplinaire en études acadiennes/Port Acadie: An Interdisciplinary Review in Acadian Studies* 22-23 (Fall 2012-Spring 2013): 57-8.

58 Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 164.

59 Lords of Trade to Wilmot, 15 May 1764, CO 218/6, p. 414, TNA; Order in Council, 11 July 1764, CO 217/21, N. 10, TNA. Sherman Bleakney, a historian and an expert on Acadian dykes, has noted “many Acadians managed to avoid the deportation and, after the arrival of the New England Planters in 1760, they were soon conscripted or coerced to instruct the English in methods of construction and repair of dykes.” See J. Sherman Bleakney, *Sods, Soil and Spades: The Acadians at Grand-Pré and their Dykeland Legacy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 45.

ambivalence regarding loyalty and the oath of allegiance was mirrored by the ambivalence of British colonial officials on the question of whether they wanted the Acadians as colonists. Lower-level officials often deferred to higher-ups for guidance regarding treatment of the Acadians. Senior colonial officials, in turn, looked to the British government for direction.<sup>60</sup> An interesting question is how the Acadians' own attitudes, throughout Nova Scotia, indecisive or otherwise, regarding allegiance to France and Britain, coupled with the indecisiveness of British colonial officials about whether or not they wanted the Acadians in Nova Scotia (including Saint John's Island), may have contributed to the Acadian odyssey and peregrinations that extended throughout the 1760s and well beyond.

It is clear that at this time the Island Acadians, like their kin on the Nova Scotia mainland, were unsure of their legal status – an uncertainty shared by the commanding officer at Fort Amherst as well as government officials at Halifax. Such uncertainty is consistent with that exhibited by General Jeffrey Amherst, dating back to 1760. In finalizing the articles of capitulation of Montreal, Amherst refused Vaudreuil's attempt to have the Acadians who were then in Canada, and also those who were near the eastern frontiers of Canada, treated in the same manner as the Canadians. While agreeing that the Acadians would have the same privileges, Amherst refused to grant them the same treatment – indicating that the Acadians would be “disposed of” according to his Britannic Majesty's pleasure; apparently he did not know what the king's intention was, or might be, and so decided to “buy time.”<sup>61</sup> The uncertainty persisted: a group of Acadians at Bonaventure, in the region of the Bay of Chaleur, offered to take the oath of allegiance before a justice of the peace in 1775 and were refused by the officer until he had received orders from the governor at Quebec.<sup>62</sup>

British colonial officials' mixed, and perhaps contradictory, views of the Acadians during this time period are well illustrated by a comment of Captain Joseph Williams of Fort Amherst in 1766: “The French on the Island who refuse to take the Oaths are all illiterate, yet have a kind of innate Policy that surprises me; always on their guard, over cautious of shewing the English their method of Furring fishing or fowling, pretending the greatest Ignorance, and yet amazingly dexterous – naturely indolent never inclin'd to work, but when compelled by hunger.”<sup>63</sup> Dichotomous views of Acadian work habits – lazy, yet possessing

60 Capt. Joseph Williams on Saint John's Island showed indecisiveness and the need for direction from Governor Wilmot of Nova Scotia; see Williams to Gage, 10 December 1765, Gage Papers, vol. 46, WCL. For Wilmot seeking guidance from Whitehall and the king becoming involved, see Lords of Trade to Secretary of State (Lord Halifax), 19 June 1764, CO 218/6, p. 427, TNA.

61 Knox, *Historical Journal of the Campaigns*, II:582-9; in particular, note articles XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLI, and LV.

62 Mason Wade, “After the *Grand Dérangement*: The Acadians' Return to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and to Nova Scotia,” in *Mason Wade, Acadia and Quebec: The Perception of an Outsider*, ed. N.E.S. Griffiths and G.A. Rawlyk (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 76.

63 Williams to Gage, 2 April 1766, Gage Papers, vol. 50, WCL. British colonial officials commonly viewed the Acadians as being lazy, a perspective shared by some French officers. For the opinion of some French officers, see Ken Donovan, “A Letter From Louisbourg, 1756,” *Acadiensis* X, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 123; Gaston du Boscq de Beaumont, *Les dernières jours de l'Acadie* (Paris: Émile Lechevalier, 1899), 73, 122, 126, 134, 269; and A.J.B. Johnston, “Avant les loyalistes – les



valuable, innate knowledge in relation to such varied pursuits as hunting and dyke building – serve, perhaps, as a microcosm of the broader sense of uncertainty, ambiguity, and flexibility evinced by the Acadians regarding the oath of allegiance and by British colonial officials in their view of the Acadians as new subjects.

Ensuring one's own survival and that of one's family is a profoundly powerful force.<sup>64</sup> In the 1760s life was difficult for Acadians. The opportunity to provide for one's family by accepting short-term employment with British entrepreneurs was very attractive, whatever the precondition concerning the oath of allegiance and whether or not an oath taken was an enduring one.<sup>65</sup> As remarked by Geoffrey Plank: "Confronted by armies and warriors who made demands on them . . . Acadians exerted self-preservation over ideological consistency more often than British officials would have wished."<sup>66</sup>

### **Commencement of British settlement**

One might conclude that by 1768 the oath of allegiance was no longer an issue. In that year, Isaac Deschamps came to Saint John's Island from Nova Scotia as part of a team of people charged with making preparations for British settlers who, it was anticipated, would soon be arriving in substantial numbers. He conducted a census of the few residents then on the Island, finding 68 people of British extraction and 203 Acadians, the latter living at St. Peters Harbour, Rustico, Tracadie, Fortune Bay, and Malpeque Bay. Most of the Acadians were in the employ of British entrepreneurs, principally in the fishery. Without any apparent sense of concern or anxiety, Deschamps wrote: "The greatest part of [the] Acadians have taken the oath of allegiance and fidelity and the others will take them as soon as they return from the fishing."<sup>67</sup>

In reality, the oath of allegiance remained an issue on Saint John's Island until at least the 1770s. Not only that, but the Acadians were still seen by at least one official as a threat. Governor Walter Patterson arrived on the Island in 1770, two years after the garrison at Fort Amherst had been withdrawn. Shortly after arriving on the Island, Patterson wrote to Lord Hillsborough, president of the Board of Trade and Plantations, about the local Acadians. If Fort Amherst were repaired and maintained, wrote Patterson, "the French inhabitants on the Island would be kept peaceable in case of a war which we have no reason to suppose would be the case in our present defenceless situation, as they may at any time cut us all off in a few days without our having it in our power to prevent them."<sup>68</sup> In the following spring Patterson

Acadiens dans la region de Sydney, 1749-1754," *La Société historique acadienne, les Cahiers* 19, no. 2 (juillet-septembre 1988): 107.

64 This truism, in an Acadian context, is dealt with by Kennedy, *Something of a Peasant Paradise?* 58-9, 73, 83, 87-9.

65 Long before the 1760s, some Acadians had taken an unconditional oath of allegiance to the British king in order to have income-generating employment. For an example in 1711, see Plank, *Unsettled Conquest*, 90.

66 Plank, "King George II and the Acadian Removal," in LeBlanc, *Du Grand Dérangement à la Déportation*, 87-8.

67 Return of the Number of Persons Residing on the Island of Saint John, July 21st, 1768, with the number of the Townships on which they reside," CO 217/45, p. 208-9, TNA. This census has been published in A.B. Warburton, *A History of Prince Edward Island* (Saint John: Barnes & Co., 1923), 146-7.

68 Walter Patterson to Hillsborough, 25 October 1770, CO 226/1, p. 17-19v, TNA.

wrote to General Thomas Gage, expressing his fears, heightened perhaps by strained relations between Great Britain and Spain, which, if war were to erupt, would bring France into the conflict on the side of Spain. He advised Gage that there were “200 Frenchmen” on the Island and that they anticipated that France would retake the Island. According to Patterson, the oath of allegiance was still a problem. He understood, also, that a visit from “the Indians of Nova Scotia” was imminent. A jittery Patterson requested Gage to send troops to Saint John’s Island.<sup>69</sup>

Gage responded by attempting to calm Patterson, indicating that he did not think the Acadians were a serious threat and that relations between Great Britain and Spain had improved through these countries having signed a convention. Nevertheless, Gage advised Patterson that “if those People refuse becoming Subjects, your Legislature will best know what is proper to be done with them.”<sup>70</sup>

Patterson’s fear of a possible Acadian reaction in the event of Great Britain finding itself at war with France was not unique among colonial governors in the region. Although the Nova Scotia government began granting land to Acadians as early as 1767 under Lieutenant-Governor Michael Francklin, in 1774 newly appointed Governor Francis Legge expressed apprehension that the Acadians would, in time of war, and notwithstanding their oath of allegiance, incite the Mi’kmaq to attack the English settlers as well as supply them with ammunition and provisions.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, trust would take time.

### Adapting to the inevitable

As colonial officials in British North America, particularly Nova Scotia, gradually became more comfortable with the continuing presence of the Acadians, the Acadians themselves gradually became reconciled to the reality that their future would be under British rule. The prospect that traditional Acadian homelands would one day again lie within a colony of France became, for them, increasingly remote.

Influences from outside the region also played a role in causing Acadians to adjust to the new reality. Perhaps most telling was pressure applied from Quebec – the weight and authority of the Bishop of Quebec Jean-Olivier Briand, who had responsibility for the affairs of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the eastern part of what is now Canada. Bishop Briand was appointed in early 1766.<sup>72</sup> His second pastoral letter was dated 16 August 1766 and directed to “the Acadians of Île Saint-Jean, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and the Gaspé.” After assuring the Acadians that he would be sending a priest to minister to their needs, the bishop wrote: “We therefore urge you, my very dear brethren, to hold yourselves as scrupulously

69 Patterson to Gage, 16 April 1771, Gage Papers, vol. 102, WCL.

70 Gage to Patterson, 8 August 1771, Gage Papers, vol. 105, WCL.

71 For land grants, see Sally Ross and Alphonse Deveau, *The Acadians of Nova Scotia Past and Present* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1992), 78; for Legge’s apprehension, see Legge to the Earl of Dartmouth, 20 August 1774, excerpted in Murdoch Beamish, *A History of Nova-Scotia or Acadie*, vol. II (Halifax: James Barnes, 1866), 520.

72 For the delicate manoeuvrings in England, France, and the Vatican that led to Bishop Briand’s appointment, and for his collaborative, mutually supportive relationship with the Governor of Quebec, see André Vachon, “Briand, Jean-Olivier,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. IV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 95-102; see also Hilda Neatby, *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age, 1760-1761* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 26-7.

faithful to our king as to our God, because you can please God only by submitting to the king in matters that do not conflict with your religion . . . .”<sup>73</sup> The bishop was referring to the king of England, not the king of France, and he was reflecting the official position of the Catholic Church at Quebec, Paris, and Rome. As a devout people, the Acadians of Saint John’s Island and elsewhere were, one may presume, influenced to some degree by the bishop’s message.

The influence of the clergy on Acadian thinking was reinforced through the work of Abbé Charles-François Bailly de Messein. He was a Quebec priest sent to Nova Scotia in 1767 to replace Pierre Maillard who ministered to the Mi’kmaq and Acadians until his death in 1762. From 1767 until 1772 Bailly de Messein laboured among the Acadians and Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia, including what is now New Brunswick. He developed close links with colonial officials at Halifax, and was instrumental in encouraging the Acadians to accept and adapt to the new political reality signified by the Treaty of Paris signed in 1763.<sup>74</sup>

According to Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor Michael Francklin, Bailly’s mission had been “of great benefit to this Province” and that it “had the good tendency of reconciling the conscience of the Acadians, who have lately taken the oaths of allegiance to His Majesty’s Government.”<sup>75</sup> Bailly is not known to have visited Saint John’s Island, although at Nepisiguit (present-day Bathurst) on 21 June 1772 he baptized 15 children, all or most of whom had apparently been brought to him by their parents from Île Saint-Jean.<sup>76</sup> Bailly influenced the thinking of many Acadians living in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and through them, likely had an indirect effect on those living on the Island. The Acadians on Saint John’s Island owned schooners and would likely have had broad contacts as a result of conducting trade with the mainland.<sup>77</sup>

For Acadians returning to Nova Scotia during the 1760s and early 1770s from exile in New England or from places to which they had taken refuge, there existed the prospect of receiving land grants from the government. This no doubt provided significant motivation to acquiesce to the oath of allegiance and to pursue a more settled way of life.<sup>78</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Michael Francklin had married a

73 Lettre pastorale de Mgr J.-O. Briand aux Acadiens de l’île Saint-Jean, du Cap-Breton, de la Nouvelle-Ecosse, de la Gaspésie, 16 août 1766, *Rapport de l’Archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1929-1930* (Québec: Rédempti Paradis, 1930), 66.

74 Claude Galarneau, “Bailly de Messein, Charles-François,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. IV, 41-4; Placide P. Gaudet, “Un Ancien Missionnaire de l’Acadie,” *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques* 13, no. 8 (août 1907): 245-9.

75 H.R. Casgrain, *Un Pèlerinage au Pays d’Évangéline* (Québec: L.J. Demers & Frère, 1887), 256-7n1.

76 Stephen A. White, transcriber and editor, *Registre de l’abbé Charles-François Bailly 1768 à 1773 (Caraquet)* (Moncton: Centre d’études acadiennes, Université de Moncton, 1978), 108-10.

77 “Return of the Number of Persons residing on the Island of Saint John July 24th 1768 with the number of the Townships on which they reside,” CO 217/45, p. 208-9, TNA. By 1803 most of the coastal trade involving Prince Edward Island was being conducted by Island Acadians. See Thomas Douglas (Earl of Selkirk), *Lord Selkirk’s Diary 1803-1804* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1958), 40-1. As mentioned, and referenced, in an earlier footnote, genealogical studies of various Acadian families on Saint John’s Island indicate that many of them moved about quite a bit during the 1760s and the several decades following. This would have resulted in a certain mobility of perceptions and thinking among many Island Acadians.

78 A condition of a land grant was the prior taking of the oath of allegiance; see Daigle, “Acadia from 1604 to 1763,” in Daigle, *Acadia of the Maritimes*, 24, 40.

Huguenot in 1762, spoke French fluently, and, as a merchant, had traded with the Acadians before becoming lieutenant-governor in 1766. He was not given to francophobia like many of his colleagues. During his six years in office, Francklin was influential with the Acadians. As already mentioned, in 1767 he began to grant land to them in southwestern Nova Scotia. For Acadians on Saint John's Island, things were quite different. Until Governor Patterson's arrival in 1770 there was no extant civil authority present and Patterson did not share Francklin's openness. Further, Patterson, even had he been inclined to grant land to Acadians, had very little Crown land to grant. The British government had already granted almost all of Saint John's Island in 1767, mostly to individuals then resident in Great Britain.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Acadians on the Island maintained their connections with kinfolk in Nova Scotia and were likely influenced to some extent by developments and changing attitudes there under Francklin.

Despite various factors that may have played a role in shaping a positive Acadian attitude toward King George III, the process of adjustment appears to have been less than swift. The American Revolution gave some Acadians hope that Nova Scotia would fall to the rebels and that an oath of allegiance to George III would become moot, or at the very least make it questionable as to what authority they might be eventually swearing allegiance. After all, more than 20 of their number had formed a militia called the "Company of Frenchmen" in the fall of 1776 under Captain Isaïe Boudrot to fight alongside Colonel Jonathan Eddy in the unsuccessful siege of Fort Cumberland.<sup>80</sup> In 1775 Bishop Briand had found it necessary to issue a pastoral warning against any Canadien who had failed in his oath of allegiance, and in the following year he instructed that "all sacraments, including those for the dying, [be] withheld from those who persisted in repudiating their oath of allegiance."<sup>81</sup>

In the 1770s, governors Patterson and Legge no doubt brought their own prejudices to their new offices in Saint John's Island and Nova Scotia, respectively, and there may also have been some lingering mistrust of Acadians. It seems that the question of loyalty to the British Crown played out over at least a couple of decades. As late as 1787, Bishop of Quebec Louis-Philippe Mariauchau d'Esgris saw fit to delve into the matter with a pastoral letter. The pastoral letter was directed to Acadians and to Catholic Scots, Irish, and English in what is today Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and

79 In 1765 Governor James Murray of Canada offered land to Acadians who were prepared to relocate there, as well as to others; see Adeline Vasquez-Parra, "L'accueil des exilés acadiens suite au Grand-Dérangement dans la colonie du Massachusetts de 1755 à 1775," *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études canadiennes* 44 (January 2011): 102, and "A Proclamation," *Quebec Gazette* (Quebec), 7 March 1765.

80 Clarence d'Entremont, "La participation acadienne à l'indépendance américaine," *La Société historique acadienne, les Cahiers* 7, no. 1 (mars 1976): 5-13; Ernest Clarke, *The Siege of Fort Cumberland: An Episode in the American Revolution* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 131, 138, 197.

81 Years before this time, Canadiens had taken the regular oath of allegiance to the British sovereign. For Bishop Briand's order of 22 May 1775, see H. Tétu and C.-O. Gagnon, dir., *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires des évêques de Québec, Volume Deuxième* (Québec: A. Côté et Cie, 1888), 264-5. See also Michel Tétu, "Quebec and the French Revolution," *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1989), 3, and Neatby, *Quebec: The Revolutionary Age*, 158.

Prince Edward Island. To some degree, a specific message was directed to residents in specific places. The message to the Acadians of Cape Sable and St. Mary's Bay concerned solely the priest who was serving them. The message to residents of Saint John's Island, Cape Breton, Miramichi, and Annaréchaque (Arichat) concerned solely the matter of "submission." They were exhorted to be "faithful to the King God has chosen to reign over you, be aware that you cannot be good Christians nor real Catholics if you are not good and loyal subjects of His Majesty."<sup>82</sup> While the bishop's remarks were aimed at Acadians, his inclusion of Scots and Irish may have been a reflection of lingering Jacobean sympathies among some of them dating back to before their emigration to what are now the Maritime Provinces.<sup>83</sup>

One writer has posited that at the time of the French Revolution, the Canadiens, although having sworn an oath of allegiance to the king of England, were "still faithful to the king of France."<sup>84</sup> That may, or may not, have been somewhat of an exaggeration, but in the fall of 1793, half a year after news of the execution of Louis XVI had reached Quebec, Bishop Jean-François Hubert felt it appropriate, if not necessary, to remind the faithful of the loyalty that they owed to the king of England. He cited six reasons why this was so; the second reason was closely connected to their Roman Catholic religion. Hubert pointed out that the oath they had taken upon Canada's becoming a British colony bound them in such a way that they could not violate it without being grievously culpable toward God himself.<sup>85</sup> It is unlikely that the bishop would have considered the Acadians to be less in need of such cautionary counsel than the residents of what had recently become Lower Canada.

The agonizing over the oath of allegiance was apparently not soon forgotten among the Acadians of Prince Edward Island, though the passage of time may have resulted in distortion or embellishment. The Bishop of Quebec Joseph-Octave Plessis visited the Island in 1812 and recorded his trip and contacts in his diary. In referring to the Island Acadians in the 1760s, he wrote: "Because of a religious misunderstanding, some of them believed that they could not, in good conscience, swear an oath of loyalty to a heretic prince; and others that did foolishly convinced themselves that such an oath was not binding, consequently they broke it and joined the French armies again."<sup>86</sup> The bishop's words refer to a time when the oath of allegiance and loyalty were subject to ambiguity, hesitation, and vacillation for Acadians on the Island and for many Acadians elsewhere in the region.

82 Tétu and Gagnon, "Lettre pastorale aux Catholiques de la Nouvelle-Ecosse," *Mandements, lettres pastorales et circulaires*, 337-8.

83 J.M. Bumsted, *The People's Clearance 1770-1815* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), 2.

84 Tétu, "Quebec and the French Revolution," 4. Michel Tétu was a professor in the Department of Literature at Laval University. In addition to publications relating to literature, Tétu wrote on historical topics, including the history of the first labour unions in Quebec and the history of la francophonie.

85 Tétu and Gagnon, *Circulaire à les cures à l'occasion des rumeurs de guerre*, *Mandements, lettres pastorales*, 471-3.

86 Arsenault, *Island Acadians 1720-1980*, 54; "Journal de Deux Voyages Apolostiques dans le Golfe Saint-Laurent et les Provinces d'en Bas, en 1811 et 1812, par Mgr. Joseph Octave Plessis, Évêque de Québec," *Le Foyer Canadien* III (Québec: Bureau du "Foyer Canadien," 1865), 195.



### **Conclusion: flexibility and inconsistency in perspective**

Even before 1713, the Acadians as a people were, alternately and sometimes simultaneously, living at the beck and call of two imperial powers. As a population “on the periphery of French power” and, subsequently, a “border people of the English empire,” for the sake of survival they quickly learned to deal with reality whatever government was in power and whoever was asking for their labour, services, produce, or loyalty.<sup>87</sup> As explained by historian Guy Frégault, “Oaths of allegiance, expulsion: these were, in Acadia, the instruments of imperialism – whether French or British.”<sup>88</sup> As noted by one of the anonymous reviewers of an earlier version of this research note, “Acadian loyalty was contingent, pragmatic, and transferable.”

From the time that Acadians first began to settle on Île Saint-Jean in 1720 until late in the 18th century, those residing on the Island maintained close connections to their kin throughout Nova Scotia and the Gulf of St. Lawrence region. There were, however, differences in the circumstances between the Acadians on Saint John’s Island and those residing elsewhere, particularly in peninsular Nova Scotia. In the latter location, the Acadians were under closer scrutiny in the 1760s on account of there being a civil government and substantial military presence there, whereas on Saint John’s Island there was only a small garrison at Fort Amherst, and it existed only until 1768. Island Acadians were able to gain employment from British and New England entrepreneurs and began to become self-employed in the fishery whereas in peninsular Nova Scotia some Acadians were employed as labourers in various sorts of construction projects, including the building and repairing of dykes.<sup>89</sup> From 1766 to 1772 a French-speaking governor at Halifax, Michael Francklin, got along with the Acadians, and it was he who began the process of Acadian resettlement by granting them Crown land. After a colonial government was established on Saint John’s Island in 1770 it largely ignored the Acadians, letting them shift for themselves during the next few decades. This meant that, like Anglophone settlers, they had to deal with the land proprietors or their agents in order to gain access to land.<sup>90</sup>

Did these differences in circumstances lead to differences in how the oath of allegiance was regarded by Acadians on the Island and those on the mainland, or in the timing of the acceptance and taking of the oath? If their position and experience with the oath of allegiance, post-1763, significantly differentiated them from their mainland cousins, that remains to be demonstrated.

It is to be hoped that additional scholarly research will shed light on the broader subject of how colonial government officials at Halifax, military officials at outposts such as Louisbourg and Fort Cumberland, and British and New England entrepreneurs in the region handled the oath of allegiance respecting Acadians

87 Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 254.

88 Guy Frégault, *Canada: The War of Conquest* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1955), 165.

89 Beginning in 1774, Acadians in the Gaspé Region found employment in the fishery with the entrepreneur Charles Robins; see David Lee, *The Robins in Gaspé, 1766-1825* (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984), 26.

90 Georges Arsenault, “Le système des propriétaires fonciers absents de l’Île-du-Prince-Édouard et son effet sur les Acadiens,” *Revue de l’Université de Moncton* 9, no. 1, 2, 3 (octobre 1976): 63-84.

during the decade or two following the end of the Seven Years War. As importantly, how did Acadians throughout the wider region react and adapt given the political and economic exigencies to which they were subjected? A comprehensive and thorough study remains to be undertaken. To what extent did uncertainty and indecisiveness in the attitudes of both British colonial officials and the Acadians play a role in the relocations – often multiple relocations – of Acadian families throughout the Atlantic region, including St. Pierre and Miquelon, during the 1760s and the following decade or two? How widespread was the belief among Acadians living in the Maritime Region during the early 1760s that France would soon regain Île Saint-Jean and other former French possessions in the region? Who or what was giving them such an impression? These questions invite further investigation.

One thing, however, is apparent. The period between 1713 and 1755 was, for the Acadians of peninsular Nova Scotia, more peaceful and prosperous than the decades before, and it was certainly more peaceful and prosperous for Acadians, regardless of where they were living, than during the decades immediately after. During this period, Acadian society was becoming increasingly well established and a societal identity was becoming more evident. Such an environment gave the Acadians of peninsular Nova Scotia a degree of self-assurance that enabled them, as a group, to cling to one position vis-à-vis British colonial officials for four decades concerning the oath of allegiance. The decades before 1713 saw a number of wars and Acadia was handed back and forth between England and France several times. This was an environment that, of necessity, caused the Acadians to be more flexible regarding the oath of allegiance. As Acadia alternated between being a French colony and an English colony, new demands were made of the Acadians regarding loyalty – reflected in a new oath of allegiance on each such occasion. Acadians reacted and adapted as political circumstances required, perhaps presuming, suspecting, or hoping that one change would not long be followed by another. For Acadians who were still in the Maritime region in the post-1758 period (the group considered in this study), including those on Saint John's Island, the Grand Dérangement caused so much upheaval and hardship that a return to flexibility in matters relating to the oath of allegiance was a virtual necessity.

Oaths of allegiance to a sovereign, as pointed out by N.E.S. Griffiths, were commonplace in both Great Britain and France, but how permanently binding they were could depend on circumstances: "It was possible to renounce and forswear past loyalties," and to embrace or affect new ones, depending on military, political and economic exigencies.<sup>91</sup> The Acadians residing on Saint John's Island during the decades after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 evidently subscribed to that principle.

EARLE LOCKERBY

91 Griffiths, *Migrant to Acadian*, 154, 464.

## Appendix

### **De Lisle De St. Jean Dit Port La joye**

Liste Des habitants acadiens Demeurants sur Lisle De St. Jean et autres places  
De La Ditte isle

#### **A St. Piere habitants**

Ambroise poirie, Marie Godet avec quatre Enfants:  
La veuve Marie Poirier: 1: Enfant:  
Joseph Bernard, Anathalie Arsenou avec quatre Enfants:  
La veuve Joseph Savoy 4: Enfants:  
Francois Bourck: Josepht Arcenou: 1: Enfant.  
Charles Doucet, Anne Arcenou: 6: Enfants:  
Piere Arcenou, Marguerite Bernard 1: Enfant  
Paul Doucet: Marie Poirier:  
Piere Poirier, Marguerite Giroire: 3: Enfants:  
Joseph Poirier: Jeanne Godet: 2: Enfants:  
Vincent Arcenou, Margt. Poirier 5: Enfants:  
Louis Arcenou Marie Poirier. 1: Enfant:  
Jean Pitre : Margte Arcenou: 2: Enfants.

#### **De La Bay Fortune**

Nore Mitchell: Isabelle Bourck  
Ambroise Bourck Veuf:  
Ambroise Bourck. Anne Brou: avec huit Enfants:  
Paul D'aigle, Marie Bourck: 7: Enfants:  
Joseph Pitre, Anne Bourck: 4: Enfants:

#### **Du moulin a vent**

Francois Ashay, Anne Boudrau: 12: Enfants:  
Joseph Chiasson, anne Ashay 4: Enfants:  
La veuve Charles Gallant : 2: Enfants:  
Pierre Melançon, Lizete Ashay: 1 Enfants.  
Louison Gallant: Anne Chiasson: 3: Enfants

#### **A Tracadie**

Jacque Chiasson, Marie Arcenou: 1: Enfant:  
Paul: Chiasson: Lizette Boudrau: 3 Enfants:

Charles Boudreau, Anne Chiasson 2: Enfants:  
Jacque Chiasson, Judith Boudrau 1 Enfants:  
Pierro Mannou: Isabelle Chiasson:  
Pierre Boudrau: Magdelaine Bourck 4: Enfs  
Francois Cormier Anne Chiasson: 9 Enfts:  
Louis Belivau, Lizete Ashay: 4: Enfants  
Michelle Doucet, Katish Boudrau 1: Enfant

### **A Rosicou**

Francois Blanchard veuve cinq Enfant  
Alexis provençal, Francoise doucet 2: Enfants  
Joseph Coumeau, anne Doucet 6: Enfants

### **Isles De la magdalaine**

Joseph Arcenau, Margueritte Boudreau 7: Enfs  
Francois Boudreau John Landrie 1: Enfant  
Charles doucet Jeane Boudreau 6: Enfs  
Joseph Boudrau Louise arcenou. 4: Enfants  
Paul arcenou Anne Bernard 2: Enfants

### **Magdelaine isles:**

Alexandre Arcenou, John Arcenou  
Magdeln Boudreaux cinq Enfants  
Jacque Arcenou, Marie Poirier  
Marie Joseph Richard 5: Enfants  
Claude Arcenou Marie Coumeau 2: Enfants  
Charles Arcenou anne Arcenou 1: Enfant  
Piere poirier anne arcenau 3: Enfants  
Jacque Ashay: Joseph Boudrau 7: Enfants  
Joseph Mimik anne Ashay 1: Enfant  
Jean Chiasson: Isabelle Boudrau 1: Enf  
Chls poirier Magln Landry 4: Enfants  
La veuve Richard cinq Enfants

### **Du Port Lajoie**

Charles Devau Marie Godet 6 Enfs  
Noré Coumeau: Marguerite Poirier 4: Enfants.  
Marie henry 6: Enfants